

DIALOGUE:

Compiled by Maximilian C. Forte

This was a special collection assembled by Lynne Guitar, as proceedings of the conference organized in the Dominican Republic in August 2002. Records of formal discussions that took place during the sessions were not kept, unfortunately. On the other hand, *KACIKE* does offer peer review of submissions, and this page contains the full range of comments and questions exchanged as a result of the submissions. Lynne Guitar suggested, given the depth and pertinence of the comments, that it be published as a formal post-script to the collection. I agree, in that we also make public some of the “behind the scenes” editorial debates.

The following exchanges (light grey boxes contain questions and follow-ups, light blue ones contain replies), took place after the collection of papers had been assembled. They occurred between editors of *KACIKE* concerning some of the points raised in the articles, especially those of Lynne Guitar and Pedro Ferbel. You are invited to share your comments by clicking on the e-mail link at the bottom of this page. Your comments will not be automatically added however, and we reserve the right to exclude any messages that we deem to be inappropriate, redundant, or that fail to contribute anything new to the discussion.

From: Maximilian C. Forte

To: Lynne Guitar

Sent: Wednesday, November 06, 2002 10:44 PM

Subject: Comparing Amerindians in the History of Trinidad and Taino History in the D.R.

In many ways the history of Trinidad and DR under the Spanish echo each other, except that Trinidad was an even more extreme case of Spanish neglect and ineptitude (I mean from a colonialist vantage point), of incomplete dominion, of constant pressure from rival European powers, of people lured to the mainland. The difference with Trinidad is that it has always been closely integrated with the Venezuelan sphere, from which most of its indigenous inhabitants came, and continued to come throughout Spanish and even British rule. This is a bit of a paradox: indigenous, yet immigrant. For Venezuelan aboriginals such as the Warao, Trinidad was never a foreign country—indeed, parts of Trinidad are still central to Warao cosmology as a physical part of their spiritual landscape (perhaps similar to the Australian Aboriginal concept of “the Dreaming”?), and up until recent times they raided the south of the island, allegedly to steal clothing and even babies asleep at night (that is one way of expanding one’s gene pool, for certain, assuming the stories even have any basis in fact).

The point I take from your paper is that the sloppiest scholarship, unquestioned and unsupported assertions, have made for the Taino extinction myth. In my mind, where

extinction occurs under the noses of those present, there would be some legend, some memorable narrative of the LAST such person to die. In Tobago, where presumably nobody is left who identifies with an Amerindian heritage, there indeed is an account of the last Carib to set off in his canoe for Grenada, I believe around 1809. The point is, when a whole people vanish, those looking on would tend to record it—if not, that would be quite remarkable indifference, even for the most hardened of European conquerors who still harboured some primitive romantic kernel in their outlooks on “the savages”. To argue for the disappearance of whole people, requires extra special academic rigour...you just can’t get away with glib generalizations and statements of probability substituted as fact. You also have to define your terms carefully—extinct what? Extinct genes? Extinct practices? Extinct identifications?

Also interesting in your paper is your focus on survival via the domestic and female dimension. Even here in Trinidad, whenever I encounter people who claim Carib ancestry, I notice that they almost always say, “my mother is Carib”, “my grandmother was a Carib”, “my great grandmother was a pure Carib”, “my great aunts taught me Carib ways”, and so on.

I would also add, in the Trinidadian case, that most of the 19th century authors who wrote books on the “dwindling” and “disappearing Indians”, were favourable to, or actual members of, local landowning families with interests in acquiring the mission lands of the Amerindians which were, by law, otherwise inalienable. These were valuable cocoa-growing lands, and there was a massive cocoa boom between 1870 and 1920. Ironically, this boom required imported Venezuelan labour...most of which consisted of mestizos and some Amerindians...thus reinforcing the local mestizo population.

One more thing: in Trinidad there is a thesis that such things as Aguinaldos emerged from the mission context, the practice of using song and music to catechize Amerindians. The way it gets translated here is that this tradition, emerging from the mission past, basically renders the institution particular to the Amerindians, and thus, after some more intellectual filtering, historically part of the colonial Amerindian experience, and after further filtering, “having Amerindian roots”. I would look into this on your end. Certainly the use of maracas is not coincidental, I don’t think.

From: Maximilian C. Forte
To: Peter Ferbel and Lynne Guitar
Sent: Friday, November 08, 2002 11:27 PM
Subject: Questions on Pedro Ferbel’s Paper

Intertwined with replies from Pedro Ferbel as per:
From: Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate
To: Maximilian C. Forte, Lynne Guitar
Cc: Baracutay1@aol.com
Sent: Sunday, November 10, 2002 6:44 AM
Subject: Re: Questions on Taino Papers

Dear Pedro and Lynne,

I have some questions and comments on Pedro's paper, in no particular order:

MAX: At the start, you mention “nationalist ideologies of progress and civilization found in the embrace of Hispanidad and Catholicism”. This is interesting because elsewhere in Latin America it is precisely these elements of the Iberian background that were singled out as cultural factors impeding progress, hence the turn towards north-western European and American models of development, rationality, the Protestant ethic, etc., with the consequent imbibing of the theories of David Ricardo, Adam Smith, Darwin and Spencer. The way you describe it here, nationalism in the DR sounds decidedly antiquated and colonial in comparison, from the standpoint of “progressivists” elsewhere in the Americas. Even in Trinidad, texts common lump Amerindians and the Spanish colonialists together, as “backward”, “unprogressive” peoples who lay dormant and indolent until the arrival of the mighty, progressive British. I also noticed that on page 2 you change the narrative by saying: “development towards a Western economy meant movement away from traditional Dominican culture and Taino heritage.”

PEDRO: Some of the questions are deeper than the points I want to make in this paper but I will respond to them anyway because they are good questions.... Nice observation. I think the first point is true, though I am no historian of Adam Smith et al., and their ideas/influence on national identity-making. I would say the DR is less progressive for its embrace of Hispanidad and Catholicism than other countries of the region. The DR's Catholic Cardinal Lopez Rodriguez still holds an official political post of some influence, for example. I'm not sure who I would reference here. Perhaps James Ferguson's *Beyond the Lighthouse* 1992 Latin American Bureau Press. So, then, I think you are pointing out something that I do not make explicit—that there has been a more recent shift, perhaps in the last thirty years, toward embracing a nationalism seasoned with neo-liberal New York oriented sensibilities that is non-traditional when compared to the Hispanidad and Catholicism that I mention. And I might again cite James Ferguson's 1992 *Beyond the Lighthouse* Latin American Bureau Press to suggest that is the newer trend. But overall, my larger point is that all these colonial and neo-colonial identity politics are very unrelated to the deepest Taino roots, and the historic Afro-Mestizo roots of the Dominican people.

MAX: The definition of “heritage” that you provide, where does that come from? For example, some definitions of heritage may make no reference to an “ancestral” past as such, just “a past” in some amorphous sense.

PEDRO: I am defining the term “heritage” much like the way many anthropologists define “ethnicity”—as a self-defining concept that may be related to culture or ancestry. I penned the definition in the paper, though it could refer to definitions made in James Clifford's (1988) *The Predicament of Culture*, James Brow, Hobsbawm and Ranger, and others.

MAX: You say that anthropology argues that there is no such thing as a “pure” culture, then just a couple of lines down you start speaking about Dominicans sharing a common UNI-cultural heritage, which to me, and possibly others as well, sounds like cultural

purity coming back in through the back door. How would you address that?

PEDRO: I could make this clearer. By uni-cultural I simply mean more or less common denominator. Purity, to me, implies strict boundaries. The uni-cultural DR identity has the flexibility to change, incorporate, creolize. Purity would suggest to me that new cultural forms are more easily excluded or considered inventions. So how do you think it would read if we just substitute “common denominator” for “uni-cultural?”

MAX: Pedro, you write: “Today, as professors, researchers, and students we must accept the responsibility to critically re-examine the stories of Taino extinction from a position free from racial politics and nationalist agendas. In such a way, we open the door for all Dominicans to understand their true history, identify with all their ancestors, celebrate their traditional culture, and look to the future for their common destiny.” However, the contradiction I see there lies in the “common destiny” notion, which sounds very much like a nationalist concept.

PEDRO: Good observation, I agree. Though their common destiny may be beyond national borders—i.e. common with Cubans, Puerto Ricans, all Indigenous Caribbean people, all Caribbean people. How about the sentence ends instead with “... and use this knowledge to help them find their path beyond Columbus’s wake.”

MAX: RE: “Dominicans have a similar conception for the lottery system, where numbers and dates never appear random but divinely ordered phenomena”—what made you conclude that this was of Taino origin? Astrology and numerology were popular with Europeans as well.

PEDRO: How true! European Americans do this too. I never felt 100 percent on this. Let’s just strike it.

MAX: You list numerous examples of the survival of Taino practices. Do those who cook, heal, build homes, and all of these other things do so conscious and/or knowledgeable of their Taino origins? The question seems, to me anyway, to be a critical one. The reader needs to know whose voice is being represented here—that of the social scientist who assigns labels to certain practices, versus that of the ‘native practitioner’ who may not give much thought to any of this. This is a question that I find is consistently evaded throughout most contemporary writings on cultural survival in the Caribbean, and it is quickly becoming a major vulnerability. How? You open yourself up to the charge that you, the “outside”, “white”, “foreign” social scientist have concocted Taino survival on paper, while on the ground people themselves care little for this, know little of it, and seem to switch to cheap foreign imports quite easily as you say. Now, I am NOT saying that the charge is correct, but you might try to “anticipate” it in some form, and maybe address it here.

PEDRO: My apologies for the long answer here. In general, some Dominicans identify with their roots vis-à-vis their culture and some do not—most do not. Yet, I am about to make the argument that for many of those who say they do not identify with their roots, that instead they really do. A big part of it is that it’s just not taught to them to be aware of such things like their history and identity. When the opportunity is brought to their attention—many more identify with their Taino roots. The problem is that the Nation and

Church have historically limited those opportunities to identify with Taino roots or just to be able to think about the concept of “identity”.

I think I agree with the interpretations I have heard from contemporary Taino activists including Naniki Reyes Ocasio, Jorge Estevez, Rene Çibánakan, and numerous Taino people, Dominicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans who have been able to articulate it. In my paper I thought I had explained it when I talk about historical strategies for Taino survival. One survival strategy for the Taino in the Greater Antilles was invisibility. Naniki talks about this as the Taino falling asleep to protect themselves for the future generations. They forgot who they were so they would not be oppressed for who they were. Today they are starting to awaken. That is to say, the Taino chose not to teach their children to identify with their ethnic roots so they would not be oppressed for having those roots. They taught the culture divorced from its origin. Over time it became ingrained.

It’s pretty similar to the process of ethnic minorities in the USA losing their languages, accents, etcetera to get the privileges of being White. Or at least gain the “privileges” of not being oppressed for being too “Non-White” (closer to the Taino story). From Swedes to Jews to Irish to Italians, to Bohemians to Hungarians, to Germans, ethnic identity was not taught to children in order to gain social and economic privileges of being White. It is a survival technique even though it means giving up the connections to the ancestors (bloodlines) and culture. It’s still a strategy today among Mexicans, Russians, Poles, etcetera. And yet many of those immigrant groups in the United States have still held on to markers like foodways.

After I gave this paper at the Museo del Hombre in the DR, my long time friend, Doña Mecho, who is from a campo of Monción, where she lives in traditional ways and makes casabe bread, asked me, ironically, “So, if the Taino survived, then where are they today?” And I looked at her and said: “They are up in a campo of Monción making casabe bread!” And she looked me straight in the eye and simply nodded.

The point is that colonized people need knowledge of history and culture to understand the subtleties of who they truly are. For that reason I would consider Doña Mecho identifying with her Taino roots when she bakes casabe bread—whether she calls herself Dominican or Taina. I would argue that for Doña Mecho, those are names for the same thing.

I understand the point of view issue of the outsider anthropologist coming in and influencing local communities, but I also think as I say, that “...as professors, researchers, and students we must accept the responsibility to critically re-examine the stories of Taino extinction from a position free from racial politics and nationalist agendas,” I wish there were more Native anthropologists and archaeologists. More Native teachers and students. But I don’t think that will happen unless those of us with the power and privilege share that power. For the most part, the “Native” archaeologists, historians, archaeologists of the Dominican Republic are from an elite class that is pretty much out

of touch with the rest of the Dominican people.

This last point was inspired by my colleagues teaching in the Black Studies department. It is a very Western goal to identify people and cultures in these ways. The concept of “identification” was most likely very different from Western notions. So the whole thrust of the question- “Do they identify or not?” could be seen as a Western and perhaps academic construction.

MAX: I would like to see one of the authors, maybe you Lynne in your introduction, give a breakdown of the ethnic composition of the Dominican Republic. Are there any people from Asia? Is there a Chinese community for example? How about from different parts of Europe? Has the DR had any immigrant labour post-slavery? From where? I, and probably other readers, need to see how much of this “tripartite” stuff is a simple generalization as compared to the current multi-ethnic reality of the DR, if it has one.

From: Lynne Guitar

To: Maximilian C. Forte, Pedro Ferbel

Sent: Sunday, November 10, 2002 10:23 PM

LYNNE: Regarding the questions on the modern Dominican ethnic component, I will attempt to find the percentages of immigrants, but yes, Max, there are Asians here today. In fact, Santo Domingo has a quite large “China Town” (they appear to have come directly to the metropolitan center), and lots of Japanese who originally came as agriculturalists, and many other ethnic groups, including American freed slaves, who settled Samaná. But isn’t this all beyond the scope of the conference—NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ABOUT TAINO HERITAGE? We could include the information, perhaps, as a footnote, or—better yet—as a separate entry on the modern ethnic component of the DR and how minority groups in the present are usually “invisible” in the general picture, just as Tainos became “invisible” in the past, despite being a palpable presence.

Further comment on the multiethnic nature of Dominican society:

From: Maximilian C. Forte

To: Lynne Guitar, Pedro Ferbel

Sent: Monday, November 11, 2002 2:36 AM

MAX: No, it would seem central to me if the conference includes as one of its subjects of concern, as you state in the Introduction, “the politics of history, race, and culture, and the composition of national identity. In this way, the cultural institutions of the Dominican Republic could see their role as leaders in the evaluation of culture for all the people of the Dominican Republic”. I need to see this whole Taino debate contextualized within the present and within the society in which it occurs. It is not therefore, I think, beyond the scope of the conference, especially if you are speaking of modern day Tainos and this “tripartite” identity which turns out to be an idealization that seems to exclude all these ethnic others. The Tainos of today live in this context, not isolated from it, and obviously you didn’t need me to tell you this. So, certainly, new directions in Taino research should take into account the construction of Dominican national identity, this

invention of a tripartite identity, and how identity itself, being relational, necessitates some understanding of context. That is just my view, and this is email, so forgive me if the tone is all wrong and it sounds like I am lecturing. I think Pedro does a pretty good job of bringing this larger contemporary context of nationalism, globalization, etc., at different points in his paper, so I just wanted some further details. Think especially of those who know nothing about the Dominican Republic.

Back to Pedro Ferbel's article...

MAX: Pedro, when you end the paper by saying, "As we say in the Cibao...", who is the "we" here?

PEDRO: "We" are those who live, work, and identify with the Cibao as their home. And I consider myself and am considered by others of the Cibao as one of those "We."

From: Maximilian C. Forte

To: Peter Ferbel, Baracutay1@aol.com, Lynne Guitar

Sent: Sunday, November 10, 2002 1:26 AM

Subject: Questions on Taino Population Stats

Dear Lynne,

Some further questions came to mind on the various population statistics and census data that you talk about in your paper. Is there any documentary information that gives numbers for Amerindians imported to work in Hispaniola's gold mines in the early 1500s, and lumped under the heading of "Indian"? Just from my own reading, I know of Amerindians exported as slaves from Trinidad, Venezuela, Margarita, and Aruba, in the early years of the 1500s, and possibly from other nearby parts as well. How many of these people, in total, arrived in Hispaniola? Having said this, with reference to the Taino faces, can you say with any certainty that these are Taino descendants and not descendants of other Amerindians brought into Hispaniola?

From: Lynne Guitar

To: Maximilian C. Forte, Pedro Ferbel, Jorge Estevez

Sent: Monday, November 11, 2002 12:09 AM

Subject: Re: Questions on Taino Population Stats, with an addendum from Lynne Guitar's doctoral dissertation.

Yes, Max, Indians were brought in from all OVER the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean to work the gold mines of Hispaniola, although the greater majority of them appear to have been Tainos from the Bahamas and other outlying areas, Guanahatabeys (if you buy the theory that many of them in north-eastern Hispaniola and in Cuba had not yet become incorporated into the "Taino"

family), and Caribs from the Lesser Antilles. I have all the documents that I could find listed in Chapter 2 of my dissertation (I have "selected" the corresponding pages and attached them), but there are no "statistics." All the demography questions that surround the Conquest Era are very "hot" topics. For example, we still have absolutely no idea of how many indigenous people there were on Hispaniola (or in the rest of the Greater Antilles) circa 1492. Were there 200,000 or 2 million on Hispaniola? The debate still

rages on in many circles, with most academics sounding decidedly medieval, for they argue vehemently whether the quantities provided by Peter Martyr were more correct than those provided by Las Casas, or perhaps Oviedo was more correct than either Las Casas or Martyr—while my work, I believe, shows that we cannot rely upon ANY of the chroniclers’ “guesstimates” as concrete data. Neither, of course, can we “count the teeth in the horse’s mouth,” as an Enlightenment Era scholar should. So how will we ever get an accurate “original population” estimate? CAN we get at least an idea of whether the original Taino population in the pre-Columbian Era was in the hundreds of thousands or in the millions? At the very least, we have eliminated the old theory that the original population had to be small because the island could not support large populations—the Tainos lived in abundance on their high carbohydrate and high caloric diet of casabe, cornbread, root vegetables, and fruit, combined with protein from a plethora of fish and other marine animals, resident and migrant fowl, and some hutia. Personally, I go along with Kathleen Deagan’s hypothesis that the higher-number estimates are probably more accurate than the smaller-number estimates, based on the analyses of material remains of the admittedly small amount of archaeological excavations that have been done on pre-Columbian sites and early Contact Era sites. We will have to leave the final analysis for some future date, IF we should ever be able to gather together the huge amount of dollars necessary to conduct the kind of extensive archaeology that would be required to more accurately

In my dissertation, I touched upon the effect of all the outside Indians whom the Spaniards brought in to work the gold mines. One of the effects of this reverse diaspora was to create a more universal concept of “Indian” among the Spaniards, who began to treat all indigenous peoples with less respect than before, for they were dealing more and more now with involuntarily imported indigenous peoples who had been ripped from their homelands and families and thrown into what was, for them, a chaotic situation, as well as with Tainos who were experiencing a similar chaotic situation because of the loss of a large percentage of their populace to disease, famine, and dispersal from their home yucayekes. (We can obviously draw assistance from scholars of the African Diaspora here.) It wasn’t only Europeans who began to have a universal concept, a universal stereotype, of “Indian.” The Tainos who survived, I believe, also began to think of themselves in an “us” vs. “them” way, recognizing the “Indian-ness” that they had in common among the survivors of the various cacicazgos and even among the themselves and the newcomer Indians, in all their variety, when compared to the Spaniards.

Tainos appear to have adopted various strategies in order to survive AND to save what remained of their beliefs and culture. Some of them, as both Pedro and I have suggested, became “invisible,” became so integrated into the now-dominant Spanish culture that they were indistinguishable, at least to the external eye, from other “Spanish” residents of the island (many were aided and abetted in this by their Spanish husbands, fathers, and bosses). But it is obvious from the vast amount of Taino culture that has survived to the present day, albeit often disguised and intermixed with other cultural beliefs, that their culture was valuable to them, and they preserved what was most valued and/or most easily

disguised.... Other Tainos and newcomer indigenes, as well as Africans, became invisible in a very different way. They escaped to the peripheral parts of the island. From the very beginning of the Contact Era, we know that Africans were running away with Tainos and forming cimarron communities with them. Why? They needed the Tainos' knowledge of the island—its escape routes, its peripheral areas, knowledge of where its scarce resources were and how to get at them—and other information that the Taino had accumulated over more than a thousand years, information about how to survive there in order to successfully run away and maintain themselves. In a like manner, both the Africans and the newcomer indigenous peoples would have merged with and adopted the Tainos' religious and other cultural beliefs along with their intimate knowledge on how to survive and THRIVE on the island, for this knowledge was not apart from their culture, but inextricably intertwined with it—see David M. Guss's *TO WEAVE AND TO SING: ART, SYMBOL, AND NARRATIVE IN THE SOUTH AMERICAN RAIN FOREST*, an incredible glimpse into the tightly interwoven complexity of myth, ritual, and daily life among the Yekuana peoples. Having read it three times now, I still get the shivers, for Guss's work reveals how very, very little any of us probably knows about the culture of the pre-Contact Era Tainos or Caribs, both of whom are distant relatives of the modern-day Yekuana.

The point I wanted to make with all this, and I'm not certain that I was clear, is to counteract before it even comes up the argument that, OK, even if some Tainos survived the Spanish Conquest, are today's Dominicans who have indigenous genes and indigenous culture TAINOS? I believe that they are, despite the fact that a few of them have decidedly Mayan faces. I believe that the biological mix revealed by Dr. Juan Carlos Martinez Cruzado's analyses of modern-day Dominicans' hair roots will show that their maternal ancestors were overwhelmingly Taino, with some input from relatively small importations of indigenous peoples from other regions of the Caribbean and circum-Caribbean. But I believe that the CULTURE that was passed on was even more predominantly Taino.

From Lynne Guitar's dissertation:

Indigenous slavery: Of cannibals and kings, “just war” and “rescate”

Edwin A. Levine writes that the Taínos “escaped technical slavery based on the church's dictum that they were worthy of conversion.”¹ He is not quite right. Columbus enslaved several hundred Taínos from the Cibao and shipped them off to Spain for sale as punishment for their uprising in 1495, although Queen Isabel ordered them to be set free and returned to Hispaniola. In 1504, however, after the Queen's death, the crown conceded that those Taínos who did not accept their position as vassals—namely, the “rebel” Taínos in the cacicazgo of Higüey—could justifiably be enslaved by reason of their rebellion against Spanish dominion,² and on April 30, 1508, a royal cédula was issued permitting the enslavement of any Indian who fled from Spanish dominion, not just those who resisted by fighting.³ Generally, however, the earliest of Hispaniola's slaves were imported from Iberia and included “ladinoized” Africans, “white” slaves (mainly Moors, but also Christians who had fallen into debt slavery or had committed

other crimes condemning them to slavery), and Canarians.⁴

Indians from the “useless” islands

There were not many slaves of any kind on Hispaniola in the first decades of its colonization because of the readily available supply of indigenous laborers. The chronicler Martyr provides extensive detail on the depopulation of the Lucayos (today’s Bahamas), which the Spaniards called “useless” islands—useless because they had no gold. The Lucayans were among the first Indians transported to Hispaniola to supplement the native population there.⁵ The Lucayans were not commended to Spaniards, but neither were they slaves. They were brought to Hispaniola as *naborías*, unattached to any particular cacique and not subject to the protections against exploitation afforded to commended Indians by the Laws of Burgos nor to those afforded to slaves.

William F. Keegan estimates that nearly 26,000 *naborías* were imported to Hispaniola in 1510 from the Bahamas alone and that by 1513 the islands were basically depopulated.⁶ The Taínos no doubt accepted the Lucayans (Western Taínos) into their *cacicazgos* as brethren. They had a language and customs, values and beliefs nearly identical to those of the Taínos of Hispaniola. The Lucayans, “like those [Indians] of this land, are already almost one people,” governor Rodrigo de Figueroa informed the crown.⁷

Caribes

The arrival of the Lucayans, then, probably did not unduly destabilize the fragile balance that appears to have been maintained between Hispaniola’s caciques and the Spanish *encomenderos*. Not so the arrival of the Caribes, whose capture and enslavement was authorized in 1503 by Queen Isabela.⁸ The capture and enslavement of Caribes was considered to be “just” because of the abominable nature of their alleged protein base—other humans.⁹

From Columbus’s first voyage on, it is clear that the Taínos perceived the Caribes as being quite distinct from themselves. They perceived them as enemies, and no doubt were responsible for starting what very well might have been rumors that caused the Caribes to have such a heinous reputation.¹⁰ Europeans were both horrified by and fascinated with cannibalism, and quite ready to believe what the Taínos told them. Everything the Taínos said about the “cannibals” seemed to be confirmed when Spaniards discovered skulls and other human remains in the Caribe villages (which may very well have been the sacred remains of ancestors). Amerigo Vespucci described cannibals in detail for an avid European audience:

“And we discovered that they were of a race called Cannibals, for almost the majority of this race, if not all, live off human flesh; and of this fact Your Magnificence can be certain. They do not eat one another, but navigate in certain vessels of theirs, called canoes, and they go to neighboring islands or lands in search of prey from among the races that are either their enemies or different from them; and they do not eat females, but rather keep them as slaves. And this we verified in the many regions where we found

such people, for many times we saw the bones and heads of some of those they had eaten, nor do they deny it, and their enemies also told us of them, living as they do in continual fear of them.” 11

The horrors of cannibalism gave Spaniards in the New World a new legal excuse for capturing not just slaves, but more *naborías* as well—rescate. “Rescate” at this time generally meant “rescue” or “ransom” and referred to those Indians whom Caribes had apparently captured and taken to their villages as slaves, as wives, or for the fattening pens.¹² The earliest royal license for rescate in the Americas appears to have been granted to Diego de Nicuesa and Alonso de Ojeda on June 9, 1508, who were permitted to bring 400 *naborías* from Tierra Firme to Hispaniola.¹³ Many, many more licenses of rescate were issued after that, for the concept appealed to the Christian-mission angle of the New World conquest and settlement.¹⁴ It was, of course, considered far better to be forced into servitude under a Christian master than to serve a cannibal.¹⁵

Indian slaving escalates

Meanwhile, the Lucayans, like the Taínos, “did not fare well” on Hispaniola, the crown noted in a letter to Colón dated June 6, 1511. Their decline was attributed to their diet, but almost certainly had more to do with being torn from their homelands and with non-immunity to European-borne diseases. In this letter, the crown issued its approval for individual Spaniards to bring Indians to the island from other regions (the letter specifically mentions Trinidad and Santa Cruz), under special license, “as long as they are not harmed so much as they have been up to now, for it weighs heavily on the [royal] conscience and does not seem very profitable for business, seeing as how many have died.”¹⁶

The 1503 license that first permitted the enslavement and sale of cannibals was granted to the Archdukes of Austria and the Dukes of Borgoña, European nobles of the highest order. In 1509, King Ferdinand issued similar licenses to Governor Ovando and to the royal treasurer Miguel de Pasamonte, the two highest officials on Hispaniola.¹⁷ In late 1511, the field was opened up wide. Royal provisions conceded to *vecinos* (“citizens”) and residents alike of both Hispaniola and Puerto Rico the rights to go to the other islands and mainland to make war against the cannibals, to capture them, and take them as slaves, as long as they were not sold outside the Indies. The islands of “Trinidad, San Bernardo, Fuerte, Los Barbudos, Dominica, Matenino, Santa Lucía, San Vicente, La Asunción, Tabaco, Mayo y Barú” and the port of Cartagena were specifically identified. Furthermore, the royal provisions conceded Spaniards the rights to these slaves “without incurring any penalties nor paying any taxes.”¹⁸

In 1512, Queen Juana publicly testified as to her approval of the “war” against the Caribes, especially in light of all the harm they had done to the new colonies on the island of San Juan Baptista (Puerto Rico).¹⁹ Besides, it was generally agreed that Caribes were stronger, thus were better workers, than the Taínos.²⁰ To the Spaniards, however, one Indian apparently looked like all the others. A royal provision dated July 25, 1511, ordered that all Indians brought from elsewhere to Hispaniola were to be branded on the

legs “in the manner prescribed by the Admiral [Diego Colón] and the other officials, so that they can be known” and distinguished from the indigenous Taínos.²¹

Clearly, the demand for indigenous slaves on Hispaniola was a response to the dwindling Taíno population. The crown was particularly worried about having enough workers for the gold mines. Not only were the natives dying off, but too many Indians were being shipped to Spain and sold there (not just slaves, but commended Taínos and imported *naborías* as well), where they commanded far higher prices than on Hispaniola. Esteban Mira Caballos’s study indicates that the average adult female Indian on Hispaniola sold for 8.54 gold pesos, while a male brought 5.32 gold pesos. In Spain, where they were considered to be “exotics,” the average sale price was nineteen gold pesos, with females consistently selling for about two pesos more than males.²² To prevent the loss of laborers on Hispaniola, on July 21, 1511, the crown issued the first of many ordinances prohibiting the sale of Indian slaves in Spain.²³

Other islands and mainland regions were rapidly added to the cannibals-available-for-enslavement list, including Florida (by which was meant the entire North American coast),²⁴ Paria,²⁵ the South American coast from the Gulf of Venezuela to “Coquibacoa” (Cubagua?),²⁶ the “Gigantes” (islands of Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire),²⁷ as well as the coasts of Mexico and the Yucatán.²⁸ By 1520, Indian slaves were also coming from mainland Brazil, evidenced by a *cédula* dated January 9 and issued to the licenciado Antonio Serrano “to buy Indians from the Portuguese and bring them to whatever part of the Indies” they were needed.²⁹ Unfortunately, the records are too scanty to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many Indians were imported to Hispaniola from any of the various regions.

By 1512, some *encomenderos* on Hispaniola had possession of hundreds of Indian slaves. Diego de Nicuesa, for example, had 200, some of whom, no doubt, were among those he had brought with him from Santa Cruz on Tierra Firme. When he died, his heir, his brother Alonso de Nicuesa, filed claim to them.³⁰ Nicuesa’s 200 Indian slaves probably were not all from Tierra Firme, however, for a *cédula* dated Mar 28, 1510, indicates that the crown had found its original permit to be “inconvenient,” though it does not suggest why. Colón was ordered to appoint an overseer to send the Santa Cruz Indians back to the mainland and replace them with others.³¹ Note that, in 1509, Diego de Nicuesa had taken 400 Taínos with him to Tierra Firme, so it was not a one-way cultural/labor exchange.³² And Juan Ponce de León had royal permission to take Taíno allies with him from Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba to help him pacify the Caribes and the Indians of “La Florida... and the other islands he discovered.”³³ The Taínos, who by 1509 were at least somewhat *ladinoized* and accustomed to working with Spaniards, would have been a real asset to the conquistadores in newly discovered lands. Too much so, perhaps. To prevent the loss of workers on Hispaniola, the crown issued orders on June 21, 1511 that “from this time forward” no Indian slaves were to be taken from Hispaniola to Castile.³⁴ On February 22, 1512, the order was reissued, adding that no Indians were to be taken from the island, nor from Puerto Rico or Jamaica. The fine for a first offense was set at 2,000 *maravedíes*, double that for a second offense, and if a Spaniard should be caught in a third offense, he would pay triple the fine and would be deprived of the Indians.³⁵ Ten

months later, the crown ordered Colón to register all the Indian slaves on the island and issued permission for vecinos to bring slaves from Cuba and Puerto Rico to Hispaniola, but only if an equal number were returned.³⁶ Obviously the newly settled islands were losing their natives at a rapid rate.

The effects of slavery

The numerical decline of Hispaniola's indigenous people—through exportation to Spain and to other Spanish colonies in addition to loss from disease, malnutrition and exploitation—coupled with the arrival of massive numbers of Indians who were not Taínos, must have been very unsettling to the native caciques. The new Indian peoples had no tradition of subservience to Hispaniola's nitaínos, nor were they expected to work through the caciques as the commended Taínos were. They were, for the most part, slaves. More important to the island's subsequent history, perhaps, is that the influx of Indian slaves affected the way that Spaniards on Hispaniola began to perceive all Indians. It is from 1512 on that the word "naboría" is used, more and more frequently, as synonymous with the word "slave" in royal cédulas and provisions, and in letters to and from the crown.³⁷

Clearly the delicately negotiated balance represented by the encomienda system as it first developed on Hispaniola was breaking down by the second decade of the sixteenth century. The mutually beneficial system whereby the Taíno caciques, as the traditional leaders of their people, organized and sent out work parties for their Spanish encomenderos in exchange for special rights and privileges, was no longer mutually beneficial. The new generation of Spaniards who came to the island, and the "old settlers" who had lived through the initial wars of conquest and pacification, began to take Indian compliance to forced servitude for granted.³⁸

By the time Colón arrived as governor and viceroy in 1509, the Spaniards were becoming more possessive, more didactical, less willing to negotiate with and defer to the Taíno caciques. And it is clear that the Taínos' socio-political structure had been all but destroyed within the first two decades of their encounter with the Spaniards. The Spanish chroniclers, however, mistook the Taínos' political disintegration for their complete social, cultural, economic and political capitulation. As shall be demonstrated in later chapters, this was not the case. Meanwhile, the Spaniards on Hispaniola turned their diplomatic efforts inward, becoming ever more deeply embroiled in their own internal politics as they scabbled over the remaining Indians and the remaining gold.

1 Levine, "Seeds of Slavery," 35.

2 Cédula of Feb 5, 1504. Martí, *Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, Vol. 1, 53.

3 CDIU, Vol. 5, 125-142. Deive observes that this was a momentous decision that affected all Indians of the Americas, not just those who were actively at war as before. Deive, *La Española y la esclavitud de los indios*, 90.

For an enlightening discussion of European concepts of violence, just war and exploitation "for the good of the empire," see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale

University Press, 1995), 29-45.

4 For more detail, see Chapter V.

5 Martyr, *De Orbe Novo*, Book 2, 248-274. See also Las Casas, *Historia*, Book 2, Chps. 43-45.

6 Today's Bahamas. See William F. Keegan, *The People Who Discovered Columbus: The Prehistory of the Bahamas* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992), 221-223.

7 AGI, Patronato 174, R19.

8 AGI, Indiferente General 418, L1, ff116r-116v. Permission to capture Caribes, who were reputed to be cannibals, was clarified in a letter from the crown to Ovando dated Nov 15, 1505: In response to "your letter saying it is necessary to know which Indians it is that can be captured and brought to the island as slaves, those that can be captured are those who do not want to obey, those who are said to be cannibals, who are those from the islands of San Bernaldo and Isla Fuerte and those from the ports of Cartagena...." Indiferente General 418, L1, ff185v-186; full text available in CDIU, Vol. 5, 110-113.

9 The expanding consequences of the "just war" ideology can be seen in the strange legal document and procedure called *El Requerimiento* ("The Requirement") that was created by a learned committee of scholars, theologians and jurists led by Dr. Juan López de Palacios Rubios, who met to debate and consider the concept. From 1513 on, each Spanish expedition had to read *The Requirement* aloud to every new group of Indian peoples encountered. The document was long and complex, but basically required all Indians to submit voluntarily to the authority of Their Catholic Majesties or be subjected to enslavement. See Lynne Guitar, "The Requirement," in *Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery*; Lewis Hanke, "The 'Requerimiento' and its Interpreters," in *Revista de Historia de América* 1 (1938): 25-34; and Patricia Seed's chapter on "The Requirement," in *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

10 See Columbus's entry of Friday, Nov 23, 1492. *Diario*, 166-167. Some scholars have recently demonstrated that the Spanish slavers accused numerous Indian peoples of being cannibals as an excuse to capture and enslave them. Others have suggested that even those Indians whom the Taínos called cannibals were simply a more recent wave of migrants from the same cultural and biological stock as the Taínos. They suggest that the two peoples were more culturally similar than formerly believed, that both peoples exercised ritual cannibalism, but neither relied upon human meat for sustenance. Jalil Sued-Badillo, *Los Caribes, Realidad or Fábula: Ensayo de rectificación histórica* (Río Piedras, PR: Editorial Antillana, 1978) and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean* (London: Methuen, 1986). Note, however, that both of these scholars have been criticized for the shallowness of their evidence. See Philip P.

Boucher's discussion of the arguments in *Cannibal Encounters: Europeans and Island Caribs, 1492-1763* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 2-8, and the debate between Hulme and Myra Jehlen, "Making No Bones: A Response to Myra Jehlen," and "Response to Peter Hulme, II" in *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Autumn 1993): 179-186 and 187-191, respectively.

11 Amerigo Vespucci, *Letters from a New World: Amerigo Vespucci's Discovery of America*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York: Marsilio, 1992), 9.

12 *Rescate* is another of the Iberian traditions that the Spaniards brought with them and modified/adapted to the New World. It initially had connotations of "trade," "barter" and

“ransom.” See Lyle M. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492-1700* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 91.

13 AGI, Indiferente General 1961, L1, ff57v-58.

14 See Deive, *La Española y la esclavitud de los indios*, 82-83.

15 The Jeronymite friars who were sent to Hispaniola as provisional governors (see Chapter IV) supported the policy of rescate and recommended to Cardinal Cisneros that more licenses for same be issued, although they wanted the mainland Indians exempted, Marté, *Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, Vol 1., 253-259. Permission for governors of the Indies to license missions of rescate was confirmed by Carlos I on Sep 6, 1521. CDHFS, 71-72.

It is clear, however, that not all the Indians who were “rescued” wanted to leave their former lives, for on Nov 17, 1526, item eight of the so-called Laws of Granada, which revised treatment of the Indians, ordered that, henceforth, no Indians could be forcefully rescued, that they must be taken voluntarily and treated well. AGI, Indiferente General 421, L11, ff332-336v. In 1534, Indians taken by rescate were no longer to be categorized as naborías, but as slaves, for their own good, because of the “idolatry, vices, sins and other abominable customs” that they fell into without strict Spanish guidance. AGI, Indiferente General 422, L16, ff61v-66v; full text available in CDIU, Vol. 10, 192-203.

16 AGI, Indiferente General 139, ff73-77v.

17 AGI, Indiferente General 1961, L2, ff117v-118 and f139v, respectively.

18 AGI, Indiferente General 418, L3, f211v and ff213-214v, dated Dec 23, 1511 and Dec 24, 1511, respectively. See also AGI Indiferente General 41, L1, ff131v-132, another version of the royal provision, this one dated Dec 24, 1511, “so that all can make war against the caribes and take them as slaves.” Full text available in CDIA, Vol. 4, 363-364. Note that, although cannibals could be enslaved without paying taxes on them, the crown still profited, for the quinto had to be paid annually on all profits earned through the labor of same. Cédula dated Jun 22, 1511, CDIU, Vol. 5, 262-264.

19 APS, Feb 28, 1512, Oficio 1, L1, f314, cuaderno 13. She also removed the stipulation that Caribs not be sold outside the Indies.

20 Letter from crown to Colón and other officials on Hispaniola dated Feb 23, 1512. Marté, *Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz*, Vol. 1, 107-108.

21 AGI, Indiferente General 418, L3, ff132r-132v.

22 Indian children on Hispaniola brought higher average prices than adult males: 8.16 gold pesos for female children and 7.35 for males. Prices from Mira Caballos, *El indio Antillano*, 288-289. Deive points out that, in the second decade of the sixteenth century, when the Indian population of the Greater Antilles had been greatly diminished and pearls were found on and around Cubagua, the price of Lucayans, who were thought to be excellent divers, went up to 30-60 gold pesos. Deive, *La Española y la esclavitud de los indios*, 98.

23 AGI, Indiferente General 418, L3, f91v.

24 AGI, Indiferente General 419, L5, ff245r-245v.

25 AGI, Indiferente General 420, L8, f69r.

26 AGI, Indiferente General 420, L10, ff243r-243v.

27 AGI, Indiferente General 419, L5, ff68-71; full text in Arranz Márquez, *Repartimientos y Encomiendas en la Isla Española*, 1991), 381-382. See also Enrique Otte, “Los Jerónimos y el tráfico humano en el Caribe: Una rectificación,” in *Anuario de*

Estudios Hispanoamericanos (1958), 5-6.
28 Cassá, Historia social y económica, Vol. 1, 54.
29 AGI, Indiferente General 420, L8, ff177r-178r.
30 AGI, Indiferente General 418, L3, ff334v-335. Diego de Nicuesa was in partnership with Alonso de Ojeda.
31 CDIU, Vol. 5, 200-205.
32 AGI, Indiferente General 1961, L1, ff131-132.
33 AGI, Indiferente General 419, L5, ff245r-245v.
34 AGI, Indiferente General 41, L1, f76. Full text in DIHC, Vol. 6, 363-364.
35 Martí, Manuscritos de Juan Bautista Muñoz, Vol. 1, 93-94.
36 AGI, Indiferente General 419, L4, ff46v-47r.
37 For example, two royal provisions dated Feb 22, 1512, confirm that the residents of San Juan and Hispaniola can go to capture “indios caribes” and keep them “as naborías for their lifetime and that of their successors” without even having to pay the quinto (the standard one-fifth tax). AGI, Indiferente General 418, L3, ff223-224 and 226-227v.
38 It is, perhaps, from this period on that Simpson gained his impression that all early Spanish conquistadores and colonists viewed the encomienda system “as a subterfuge for slavery.” Simpson, The Encomienda in New Spain, xiii.

From: Maximilian C. Forte
To: Lynne Guitar, Pedro Ferbel, Jorge Estevez
Sent: Monday, November 11, 2002 3:44 AM
Subject: Questions on Taino Population Stats

I generally agree with your comments. I am glad that I raised an issue that has arisen here in Trinidad, and which I think is a false trap. If we believe the archaeologists, that for thousands of years, and certainly hundreds, there has been concerted inter-island trade, conquest, marriage, and so forth. None of these populations was ever “purely local”, or generated entirely *in situ*—obviously. That is the paradox of Caribbean indigeneity, that is, it is not necessarily rooted in some fixed or absolute sense. Here in Trinidad some individuals cringe when the discussion of “Venezuelan roots” arises, as if this threatened to undermine their indigeneity. Quite the contrary, I argue: there was never any such thing as a uniquely local Trinidad indigenous tribe—movement back and forth from the mainland was regular and normal, and Trinidad itself was part of the wider Amazon-Orinoco complex of indigenous cultural flows. So we should not feel forced to portray these groups as isolated in order to enhance their legitimacy. In addition, we should not be blinded by modern day state-centric inventions of such entities as “Trinidad, “Venezuela”, or the “Dominican Republic”, which have no cultural or even demographic significance when extended backwards in time.

As you mentioned, some will ask: “OK, even if some Tainos survived the Spanish Conquest, are today’s Dominicans who have indigenous genes and indigenous culture TAINOS?” The answer is that this is not entirely relevant or important. The reality was far more fluid than the question assumes. It’s if someone says: “no, these are definitely Taino because we hardly see any inputs from anywhere else in the Caribbean”, that I would then become very suspicious—suspicious that a new and modern system of

identification, requiring that cultures be fixed in places, suiting current state-centric assumptions, had been invented and applied retroactively. My own answer might be: “sure there are inputs from all over the Caribbean, and why not? What’s the problem?”

From: Maximilian C. Forte
To: Lynne Guitar, Pedro Ferbel, Jorge Estevez
Sent: Monday, November 11, 2002 3:53 AM
Subject: Extinction is good for some but not others?

MAX: I forgot another question that I VERY much wanted to raise, and am considering raising it in Carbet-L as soon as I can refine the question a little more.

We, and I mean we as in those of us emailing each other here, would not be prepared to accept that there was any extinction of the Amerindian inhabitants of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola (or should I specify the Dominican Republic?), Dominica, Saint Vincent, Saint Lucia, or Trinidad.

These are the ones we always mention.

Now, does that mean that we ARE willing to concede that the extinction myth is not a myth when applied to OTHER islands, like those where you never hear of people claiming an aboriginal identity? I think here of Anguilla, Antigua, Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, Montserrat, Martinique, I could go on: in fact, the majority of Caribbean islands, and, interestingly all of the smallest ones.

Does size matter?

Does self-identification matter?

Is the extinction myth valid for some and not others?

This reminds me of the case of Tobago, closer to my current home. Everyone, including the Carib Community, is prepared to accept that there are NO MORE Amerindian descendants left in Tobago, within visual range from the northeast coast. Yet, the now dominant thesis is that some indigenous inhabitants survived in Trinidad. Why Trinidad and not Tobago, which is SO close? That seems almost bizarre.

Tell me what you think.

From: Pedro Ferbel-Azcarate
To: Maximilian C. Forte, Lynne Guitar, Jorge Estevez
Sent: Tuesday, November 12, 2002 4:12 AM
Subject: Extinction is good for some but not others?

PEDRO: I agree with Jorge [message not included]—innocent until proven extinct! I know from my sister’s Jamaican Mother-in-law that Jamaican people refer to certain areas as being more “Indian” than others. In this she is referring to the way the people look, not their having more Indigenous culture. I have also heard about this on the island

of Grenada. I remember even seeing some old publication that refers to the Caribs of Grenada. I think the Bahamas may be a place I might consider to be without Indigenous people, but I have never been there, so what do I know? Open book, as far as I'm concerned. We should ask Jay Haviser for his opinion on the Indigenous people of the Dutch Antilles. He wrote a great article about perceptions of Indigenous survival on Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao...

When I was at the American Museum of Natural History last fall on a panel with Roberto Borrero and Naniki Reyes Ocasio, the moderator Gabriel Haslip Viera asked us the same question somewhat disparagingly. I said, whether or not there were other Native people in the Caribbean in certain historical circumstances, they did not make much of a difference in terms of Taino survival because all the Indigenous survivals that we know about are related to historical, archaeological and linguistic evidence of them having a Taino origin. There are no pyramids in Puerto Rico. There are no (significant quantities of) Central American ceramics in the Caribbean, no lithics, no linguistics (well, maybe Indigenous people brought Aguacatls and tomatsl, but just as likely the Europeans).

The only evidence we seem to have is what my sister's Mother-in-law or what Lynne refers to as people "looking more" Mayan or Indian or whatever. But, I am pretty unconvinced that the phenotypic expression of individuals necessarily relates to their having a particular genetic heritage. In a broad sense yes, but I don't think we humans can look at a person and make reliable conclusions about their 64 great great great grandparents. Or their 128 great great great great grandparents.

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